

*Statement of*

**VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA**



*Submitted by*

**Richard F. Weidman**  
**Executive Director**  
**for Policy and Government Affairs**

*Before the*

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS**

*Regarding*

**Filipino Veterans of World War II**  
**February 15, 2007**

Chairman Filner, Ranking Minority Member Buyer and other distinguished members of the subcommittee, Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) is pleased to appear here today in support of amending title 38, United States Code which would grant pension benefits for Filipino veterans of World War II living in US and in the Philippines.

Mr. Chairman, VVA strongly believes that those brave Filipino veterans of World War II who were drafted into service by President Franklin D. Roosevelt over sixty years ago are entitled to benefits that they were promised.

Under the command of General Douglas MacArthur, these Filipino soldiers fought side-by-side with forces from the United States mainland, defending the American flag in the now-famous battles of Bataan and Corrigidor. Thousands of Filipino prisoners died, both on the Bataan death March and in prisoner of war camps. The Philippines endured four long years of occupation, and after its liberation, the United States used the strategically located Commonwealth as a base from which to launch the final efforts to win the war.

With the vital participation of Filipino soldiers so evident, VVA finds it hard to believe that, soon after the war ended, the Congress of 1946 unceremoniously deprived many of the Filipino veterans of benefits and veterans' status. Prior to enactment of the "Rescission Act" on February 18, 1946, Filipino veterans were considered veterans by VA law.

Congress has an opportunity at this hearing today to correct a wrong that was perpetuated on these brave veterans almost sixty years ago. During World War II, Filipino nationals were called into military service by Executive Order of the President and fought valiantly under U.S. command to help achieve peace and freedom in the Pacific. After the war, the United States made grants to the Philippine government to provide for the needs of these veterans. In addition, some are eligible for benefits under the United States veterans system. However, many of these deserving veterans living in the United States are currently not eligible for such benefits.

VVA recognizes the leadership of this Committee to ensure that these brave men who served at our side as staunch allies are treated properly today, correcting a wrong done in 1946. VVA particularly thanks and commends you Mr. Chairman, for your strong leadership and hard work over the years on this issue which enables us to arrive at this hearing today and begin to right an unjust wrong for our Filipino veterans.

In 2000, Commonwealth Army veterans and veterans of Recognized Guerilla Forces were offered veterans disability compensation at the full statutory rate if they are permanent legal residents of the United States. Other veterans became eligible to receive VA health care if they are permanent U.S. residents receiving disability compensation from the VA Department. Also in 2000, Commonwealth Army and Recognized Guerrilla veterans became eligible to be buried in VA national cemeteries if they were permanent residents of the U.S. at the time of their deaths.

In 1990 a law was passed awarding citizenship to Filipinos who had fought on the side of the United States in World War II. As a result of that legislation, about 26,000 aging veterans were naturalized as US citizens. But there was nothing in the legislation about veterans' benefits. The new citizens, if they were poor, were eligible only for welfare payments on the same basis as non-veterans.

VVA believes the passage of the U.S. Rescission Act of 1946, which stated that military work of Filipino soldiers, scouts and guerrillas was not considered active service in the U.S. armed forces, was incorrect and this proposed legislation will address some of the flaws in that law.

Mr. Chairman, the long struggle staged by Filipino veterans demanding equity in their treatment by the United States has gone on for more than half a century. VVA strongly believes because of the aging population of the Filipino veterans there is an urgent need for this proposed legislation. Frankly, the legislation should have been enacted during the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress. As there are so few of these distinguished fighters for America's freedom left alive, the cost is negligible in comparison to the size of the Federal budget. While justice delayed has proved to be justice denied for those who have passed away, at least for those still alive. These aging Filipino soldiers who fought under the US flag in World War II must be helped now, when it matters most, before they all die.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes the testimony of Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA). I will be more than happy to answer any question that the committee may have.

**VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA**  
**Funding Statement**  
**February 15, 2006**

The national organization Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) is a non-profit veterans membership organization registered as a 501(c)(19) with the Internal Revenue Service. VVA is also appropriately registered with the Secretary of the Senate and the Clerk of the House of Representatives in compliance with the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995.

VVA is not currently in receipt of any federal grant or contract, other than the routine allocation of office space and associated resources in VA Regional Offices for outreach and direct services through its Veterans Benefits Program (Service Representatives). This is also true of the previous two fiscal years.

For Further Information, Contact:

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## RICHARD WEIDMAN

Richard F. “Rick” Weidman serves as Executive Director of Policy and Government Affairs on the National Staff of Vietnam Veterans of America. As such, he is the primary spokesperson for VVA in Washington. He served as a 1-A-O Army Medical Corpsman during the Vietnam war, including service with Company C, 23<sup>rd</sup> Med, AMERICAL Division, located in I Corps of Vietnam in 1969.

Mr. Weidman was part of the staff of VVA from 1979 to 1987, serving variously as Membership Service Director, Agency Liaison, and Director of Government Relations. He left VVA to serve in the Administration of Governor Mario M. Cuomo (NY) as statewide director of veterans employment & training (State Veterans Programs Administrator) for the New York State Department of Labor.

He has served as Consultant on Legislative Affairs to the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans (NCHV), and served at various times on the VA Readjustment Advisory Committee, the Secretary of Labor’s Advisory Committee on Veterans Employment & Training, the President’s Committee on Employment of Persons with Disabilities - Subcommittee on Disabled Veterans, Advisory Committee on veterans’ entrepreneurship at the Small Business Administration, and numerous other advocacy posts in veteran affairs.

Mr. Weidman was an instructor and administrator at Johnson State College (Vermont) in the 1970s, where he was also active in community and veterans affairs. He attended Colgate University (B.A., (1967), and did graduate study at the University of Vermont.

He is married and has four children.